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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3903  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 1188  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3974  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1167  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3060  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 7854  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5509  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0310  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 COLOMBO 000977

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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND PM  
MCC FOR D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: INSTABILITY IN THE EAST MAKES FREE AND  
FAIR ELECTIONS DIFFICULT

REF: A. COLOMBO 971

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 946

[1](#)C. COLOMBO 973

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, James R. Moore, for reasons 1.4(b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: After more than a year of fighting to rid the eastern province of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Government is making preparations to hold elections as a concrete sign that order has been restored. However, significant obstacles remain that could jeopardize the GSL's plan to hold free and fair elections. In the vacuum created by the Tigers' retreat from the East, paramilitary groups are struggling with each other, as well as with existing political parties, to fill the void. Serious concerns remain about whether IDPs can participate in the political process since they cannot vote outside their home districts. Further, elections could provoke the LTTE to launch attacks designed to show that the Tigers are still a force to be reckoned with. Even if the GSL is able to overcome these hurdles, elections could undermine the efforts of the All Parties Representatives Committee (APRC) to obtain consensus on a devolution proposal. END SUMMARY.

FALL OF TIGER STRONGHOLDS PAVES WAY FOR ELECTIONS  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) In April 2006, the Sri Lanka military began a campaign to drive the LTTE out of the East. Although victory took longer than anticipated, on July 11 military spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe issued a statement that the military had taken Baron's Cap, the final high point of the LTTE's last remaining stronghold in Thoppigala (ref A). For months media outlets speculated that the GSL would hold elections in the East after the fall of Thoppigala as a sign that it had liberated the people from Tiger oppression. Defense

spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella routinely denied these rumors until June 28 when the GSL announced that it intends to hold elections in the East.

¶3. (C) The GSL announcement did not offer a time frame or elaborate on the type of election that would be held. Municipal elections were held in areas of the East that are dominated by the Sinhalese and Muslims in February 2007, but the Election Commission postponed elections in Tamil areas, citing security concerns. As a result, if the GSL calls for municipal elections, they will only be held in Tamil areas. Prior to February 2007, municipal elections had not been held in the East or North since November 2001. It is possible that the GSL will call for provincial elections, although that raises significant political concerns about the impact these elections will have on the APRC process, as described below. Provincial elections have not been held in the East since 1988.

#### GSL OPENS DOOR FOR NEW POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE EAST

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¶4. (C) Ambassador met with President Rajapaksa's brother and Chief Political Advisor Basil Rajapaksa on July 2 to discuss potential elections. Basil told Ambassador that the GSL would invalidate all previously registered candidate nominations to allow for unregistered parties, like the Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP or Karuna faction), to run for election (ref B). Although the Karuna faction has been linked to numerous illegal acts and still operates as a paramilitary group, its leader, Karuna Amman, has publicly announced the TMVP's intention to transform itself into a legitimate political party. The Karuna faction is seen as an

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administration-friendly Tamil group that can be used to counter opposition Tamil parties in the East like the Tamil National Alliance (TNA).

¶5. (C) On July 6, the Elections Commission did exactly what Basil Rajapaksa predicted and recommended to Parliament that it call for new candidate nominations. The Cabinet voted on July 11 to accept the Election Commission's recommendation and submit the issue to Parliament for a vote. Parliament is anticipated to vote on the Election Commission's recommendation on Thursday, July 19, and a simple majority could invalidate past candidate nominations paving the way for other political parties to enter the race. Although no date for elections in the East has been officially announced, United National Party (UNP) member of Parliament Lakshman Seneviratne told Poloff on July 9 that elections will likely be held in November. On July 12, Minister for Export Development and International Trade G.L. Peiris told Charge that elections will occur "before the end of the year."

#### UNDERMINING THE APRC PROCESS

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¶6. (C) Numerous parties have expressed concern that the Rajapaksa administration will manipulate elections to place administration-friendly officials in key positions within the district and provincial governments, a move that would undermine the intent of the devolution process. However, Basil Rajapaksa reassured Ambassador that elections in the East would not short-circuit the APRC process. He stated that the administration was not prepared to hold district or provincial elections for fear that administration-friendly candidates would not win (ref B). As a result, he said that the GSL would only hold municipal elections this year.

¶7. (C) However, Defense Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa confided to Ambassador on June 20, prior to the election announcement, that some advisors within the administration feared elections would jeopardize the APRC process. Basil Rajapaksa explained to Ambassador on July 2 that these concerns continued because the official election announcement

used a generic Sinhala word that can mean municipal, district or provincial. Ambassador encouraged Basil Rajapaksa to clarify this point so that people know that the GSL is still firmly committed to the APRC process. So far, the GSL has not amended its official announcement as the Ambassador recommended.

18. (C) Despite the GSL's claims, Embassy interlocutors still speculate that the GSL may call for district or provincial elections. They argue that if it looks as though Parliament were going to pass a devolution proposal which would limit the administration's power, the administration may counter Parliament's efforts with broader elections. However, as prospects for the APRC process continue to dim, this argument is weakened (ref C). Despite such speculation, Post has no reason to believe that the GSL will call for anything other than municipal elections.

#### CLASH OF PRO-GSL PARAMILITARIES

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19. (C) Any elections held in the East will likely be hotly contested. Pro-GSL Tamil paramilitary groups are struggling to fill the power void created by the defeat of the LTTE in the East. One such group is the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) which has never had a strong influence in the East. Its leader, Douglas Devananda, is a member of Parliament from Jaffna. EPDP only has four offices in the

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eastern province but has become increasingly active in attempting to generate support in anticipation of elections. The TMVP, having worked with the military to target the LTTE in the East, has no intention of relinquishing power to EPDP as it seeks its electoral objectives.

110. (C) This has generated tensions, such as occurred on July 4 when five Karuna cadres entered the EPDP camp adjacent to the Komathurai Army Base near Batticaloa, throwing grenades and firing at one of the houses. Two EPDP cadres were wounded, and Sri Lanka Army soldiers returned fire on behalf of EPDP, killing one of the Karuna cadres before the other four retreated. After the skirmish, both EPDP and Karuna plastered notices around Batticaloa denigrating the other paramilitary group. Karuna's notices encouraged Tamils to rid the East of "Jaffna Tamils" and alleged that they were LTTE sympathizers. EPDP notices encouraged Tamils to reject "opportunists" like Karuna in favor of a "traditional" Tamil organization like EPDP. On July 9, the Karuna faction and EPDP issued separate but identical press releases stating that the two organizations had agreed to suspend hostilities. Although armed conflict may not continue between EPDP and Karuna, it is unlikely that hostilities will cease.

111. (C) Minister Peiris told DCM on July 12 that although there may be "glitches" in holding a fully free and fair elections in the East due to paramilitary involvement, it was still a "golden opportunity" for the GSL to demonstrate its commitment to all three communities, Sinhalese Muslim and Tamil.

#### KARUNA ATTACKS THE ONLY ORGANIZATION WITHOUT A GUN

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112. (C) In addition to challenging other pro-government paramilitary groups, the Karuna faction has threatened existing political parties. The Tamil National Alliance has been the traditional Tamil political party in the East but critics have often accused it of being sympathetic to the Tigers. In the absence of the Tigers, Karuna seems intent on taking political power from the TNA by any means necessary. For example, Ampara TNA member of Parliament C. Chandranehru told Poloff that on June 11 TMVP Eastern Deputy Commander Iniya Bharathi threatened to kill him at gun point if he did not relinquish his seat in Parliament. (Note: The Karuna faction may have believed that a general election will be

held rather than municipal or provincial elections. End note) This threat was followed by a phone call warning Chandranehrhu that his wife and son, currently living in London because of security concerns, would be killed if he did not resign. Chandranehrhu told Poloff that he will not abandon his seat in Parliament, despite Karuna's threats.

¶13. (C) On June 28 suspected Karuna cadres assassinated the TNA's Ampara Party Chairman Thillainathan Uthayakumar. Uthayakumar had worked closely with Chandranehrhu during his election campaign in 2005 and had been Chandranehrhu's father's campaign manager. The TNA has accused the GSL of authorizing Karuna to attack TNA Parliamentarians and take political power from the TNA, despite the comparatively greater support the TNA enjoys among the Tamil masses. The GSL adamantly denies this accusation, but no arrest has been made for Uthayakumar's murder.

#### MUSLIMS JOIN THE PARAMILITARY FRAY

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¶14. (C) Muslims make up approximately one third of the population in the East, but often complain that their

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interests are under-represented. Although Muslims speak Tamil, they consider themselves to be a separate ethnic group and often clash with both Tamil and Sinhalese communities. However, Sri Lankan Muslims have not historically engaged in organized violence. Despite this, Embassy interlocutors have recently reported that a Muslim paramilitary group calling itself "Jihad" is gaining strength in traditionally Muslim-dominated areas such as Ampara as well as in other eastern cities including Batticaloa and Trincomalee. Mr. S. Mamangarajah (strictly protect), Director of the USAID-funded International Youth Foundation Work Force, told Poloff on July 9 that Jihad is led by former member of Parliament and Deputy Director of the Muslim National Unity Alliance M.L.A.M. Hizbullah who has armed approximately 200 fighters with funds obtained from Saudi Arabia. On July 12, Secretary General of the Peace Secretariat for Muslims M.I.M. Mohideen confirmed that some Muslim youth were "taking up arms," but added that the Peace Secretariat is working to maintain peace.

¶15. (C) Jihad claims to be a defensive organization whose primary objective is to "protect" the Muslim community from encroachment by both Sinhalese and Tamils. If municipal elections are held in the East, then there would be little reason for Jihad or any other Muslim organization to become involved because municipal elections in Muslim areas were completed in February, 2007. If, however, the GSL calls for provincial elections, the Muslim community seems intent on ensuring that it is not under-represented this time. Embassy will continue to monitor whether Jihad's definition of "protection" includes defending the Muslim community from possible electoral bullying by other paramilitary groups like the Karuna faction and EPDP.

#### CONCERNS ABOUT IDPs VOTING RIGHTS

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¶16. (C) TNA leader R. Sampanthan has cautioned Parliament that elections in the East cannot be considered fair if Tamils displaced by fighting are not permitted to vote. Sampanthan's primary concern is that thousands of displaced Tamils are living with family members rather than staying in IDP camps. Additionally, many IDPs still express deep concerns about security, despite the Tigers' defeat, and have declined to return to areas that the GSL says are clear for resettlement. USAID officers working in the East have reported that the GSL is rushing to resettle IDPs, often into areas that have not been fully cleared of mines or unexploded ordinances. Also, the GSL does not count Tamils living with relatives as IDPs who, if outside their home district, would not be allowed to vote in their relatives' districts. Traditionally, one of the TNA's largest voting blocks has

been poor Tamils, so it views any failure to fully resettle Tamil IDPs in advance of elections as a direct attack on its political base. Further, it interprets the GSL's "rush" to hold elections as an attempt to undercut the TNA's base while supporting its political rivals, including the TMVP. However, Basil Rajapaksa told Ambassador on July 2 that the GSL would not hold elections, municipal or otherwise, unless all IDPs had been properly resettled. Ultimately, this issue may turn on the definition of "IDP" and "resettled."

TIGERS ARE STILL A FACTOR

¶17. (C) Although the LTTE no longer occupies geographic strongholds in the eastern province, even the GSL's official web portal has acknowledged that the Tigers remain a threat. Since the beginning of the armed conflict in 1983, the Sri Lanka military has driven the LTTE out of various areas

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several times, even capturing the Tiger's "capital" in Kilinochchi twice. Each time, the Tigers have responded with guerrilla warfare tactics that have made it impossible for the GSL to maintain stability and forced the GSL to relinquish control of these areas. The Defense Secretary has publicly stated that the GSL will not fall victim to this tactic again, and the military has maintained an increasingly tight grip on Sri Lanka's roadways and the newly cleared areas. However, it is virtually impossible for the government to completely eliminate the threat of terrorism. The LTTE would likely view disrupting elections as an effective way of demonstrating that the GSL has still not "liberated" the East.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: The Rajapaksa administration is under significant pressure, not only from opposition parties like the UNP and TNA, but also from political parties traditionally allied with the administration, like the JVP. The administration hopes to strengthen its position by capitalizing on its military victories. As a result, there is increasing pressure on the President to call for elections quickly and to make them broad enough to ensure an increase in his political base. However, the administration seems caught between two difficult choices. If it moves too quickly, it runs the risk of harsh criticism that the election is not fair. This criticism could erode the popular support the administration has gained from defeating the Tigers and damage administration-friendly candidates' potential for success at the polls. If the administration waits to further settle matters in the East, it runs the risk of losing the momentum gained from defeating the Tigers. Rajapaksa is likely to go with the option he feels will result in the greatest political gain, regardless of whether that ultimately produces a "glitch free" election.

MOORE